

## **Draft: MAFAC comments on the National Ocean Policy Draft Implementation Strategy.**

The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) advises the Secretary of Commerce on matters related to living marine resources. MAFAC supports the need for a national vision for the oceans, and MAFAC commends the authors of the National Ocean Policy on the extraordinary investment of time and effort into the creation of the National Ocean Policy, and the Implementation Plan. However, fisheries and aquaculture should be given greater deference in these documents, because these industries symbolize the present and the future of the oceans, both domestically and internationally via goals for improving food security, preserving social and cultural heritage, and promoting stability in international relations.

To begin with, the strategy itself describes the significant economic engine that is fueled by renewable living marine resources, supporting commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture and generating present day sustainable U.S. and foreign jobs. Domestically, they serve as foundational employers in of many coastal communities dating back centuries, and even in the present day, commercial and recreational businesses are often the sole economic prospect in small coastal communities, and customary uses of the nation's living marine resources underpin the culture and traditions of many American citizens. Internationally, these industries represent enormous portions of the economy in many growing nations. Fisheries policy even has consequences for international relations and nation building, with fishing rights and treaties influencing the success or failure of many nations' economy, health and stability.

Fisheries and aquaculture also offer solutions for the future. In public health policy, these industries can serve as energy-smart sources of new food supplies, contributing to improved human health through promotion of healthy fish protein choices, and presenting an alternative to pollution- and carbon-intensive livestock and agriculture. The highly effective and efficient aquaculture industry may also prove to be an essential tool to achieving global food security.

For the reasons above, MAFAC suggests that the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan should be revised to elevate the profile of and priority given to both fisheries and aquaculture. In the current draft of the 118 page policy document, the terms fishery (4 references), fisheries (14 references) and aquaculture (19 references) have limited overall significance. Given the prospect of preparing a document that would be acceptable to all federal agencies with any kind of stake in the ocean, it's not surprising that all uses and users of the ocean are given equal weight and priority in the draft Implementation plan. As a result the scale and scope of the objectives and strategies presented remain overwhelmingly large. The lack of strategic prioritization may result in a paralysis of inaction that ensures the status quo. In the context of a new ocean policy, however, fisheries and aquaculture should not be equated with other ocean use topics, such as oil and gas and renewable energy. Unlike these other matters, fisheries and aquaculture are uniquely connected and dependent on the ocean for which there is no substitute. MAFAC believes that rather than merely serving as a referenced concept within portions of the implementation plan, fisheries and aquaculture concepts should be given a central role, even an independent section, with a focused priority of tackling the challenges of living marine resource stewardship first. Moreover, the organizational structure to carry out this strategy needs to be rethought. As President Obama's recent remarks on consolidation of federal agencies suggested, there are possible efficiencies and economies through consolidation of functions. However, it is MAFAC's view that, in lieu of consolidation of NOAA in the land-centric Department of

Interior, all ocean stewardship and science functions should be consolidated in a new Oceans agency, with NOAA at its core.

The effect and importance of fisheries and aquaculture to ocean policy cannot be overstated. The oceans are the fisheries. For the reasons above, the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan needs revision.